

Attorney Docket No.: 051481-5077
Application No.: 09/986,758
Page 4 of 8

REMARKS

The final Office Action dated 17 October 2003 has been reviewed. Claim 5 has been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer, claims 1, 3, 7 and 10 have been amended, claims 2, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 11 remain as originally presented, claims 12-22 stand withdrawn from consideration, and new claim 23 has been added. Claims 1-11 and 23 are respectfully submitted for reconsideration.

Claims 1-3 and 5-11 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 1,472,265 to Bell. Claim 4 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 4,512,368 to Kaminaka et al. (Kaminaka). These rejections are respectfully traversed in view of the above amendments and the following comments.

Amended claim 1 recites a combination of features including an "inlet being centered around and extending along a first axis," "each outlet of the first bank of outlets being centered around and extending along a respective second axis, the second axes defining a first plane parallel to the first axis," and "each outlet of the second bank of outlets being centered around and extending along a respective third axis, the third axes defining a second plane parallel to and offset from the first plane." Support for these features may be found in, for example, Applicant's Figures 1 and 2 as originally filed.

In contrast to Applicant's invention, Bell's Figures 1 and 2 show, and Bell states at page 1, lines 8-13 and 37-42, that a steam supply manifold has a plurality of delivery pipes that are each independently controlled by a respective corresponding globe or angle valve. Whereas Applicant's claim 1 recites a diffuser, Bell shows a valve manifold. Moreover, Bell shows a steam supply nozzle 1a and sleeves 3a that extend perpendicular, rather than parallel, with respect to one another. And Bell fails to teach or suggest a first bank of outlets lying in a first plane that is parallel to and offset from a second bank of outlets that lie in a second plane. Specifically, Bell's sleeves 3a extend along axes that define a single plane, i.e., there is not a second plane that is parallel to and offset from Bell's single plane.

At least for the above-described reasons, it is respectfully submitted that claim 1 is allowable over Bell, and that the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) should be withdrawn. Claims 2, 3, 6-11 and 23 depend, directly or indirectly, from claim independent 1, and therefore recite the same combination of allowable features as well as reciting additional features that further distinguish over Bell.

Attorney Docket No.: 051481-5077
Application No.: 09/986,758
Page 5 of 6

In contrast to the invention recited in Applicant's claim 4, Kaminaka's Figure 2 shows, and Kaminaka states at column 2, lines 34-36, that the centers of the respective branch pipes 3 are located at equally spaced positions along a circle which is concentric with branching portion 4. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that Kaminaka fails to teach an "inlet being centered around and extending along a first axis," "each outlet of the first bank of outlets being centered around and extending along a respective second axis, the second axes defining a first plane parallel to the first axis," and "each outlet of the second bank of outlets being centered around and extending along a respective third axis, the third axes defining a second plane parallel to and offset from the first plane." At least for the above-described reasons, it is respectfully submitted that claim 4 is allowable over Kaminaka, and that the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) should be withdrawn.

Attorney Docket No.: 051481-5077
Application No.: 09/988,758
Page 6 of 6

CONCLUSION

It is respectfully submitted that the application is now in condition for allowance and an early notification of such is earnestly solicited. Should the Examiner feel that there are any issues outstanding after consideration of this reply, the Examiner is invited to contact Applicant's undersigned representative to expedite the prosecution.

Entry of this reply is earnestly solicited inasmuch as it is respectfully submitted that it raises no new issues, does not present any new matter, does not increase the number of claims pending, and places the application in condition for allowance.

EXCEPT for issue fees payable under 37 C.F.R. § 1.18, the Commissioner is hereby authorized by this paper to charge any additional fees during the entire pendency of this application including fees due under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 and 1.17 which may be required, including any required extension of time fees, or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account 50-0310. **This paragraph is intended to be a CONSTRUCTIVE PETITION FOR EXTENSION OF TIME** in accordance with 37 C.F.R. § 1.136(a)(3).

Respectfully submitted,

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